

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

STUBBLEFIELD RANCH ACQUISITION PROJECT

FONSI 12-13-MP

Recommended by:

Douglas Kleinsmith

Date: 12/5/12

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Concurred by:

Dan Strait

Date: 12/5/12

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Program Manager, Habitat
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Approved by:

Anastasia Leigh

Date: 12/10/2012

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Regional Environmental Officer
Mid-Pacific Region
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Approved by:

Dan Meier
for Cesar Blanco

Date: 12/11/12

Chief, Project Implementation Division
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U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region

December 2012



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
Sacramento, California

Background

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are proposing to provide \$874,567 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP) and \$108,970 from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program (HRP) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help purchase the 1,615-acre Stubblefield Ranch property. The property is located at the southeastern end of the Carrizo Plain National Monument (CPNM) at the border of San Luis Obispo and Kern Counties. The property has been a high priority acquisition for BLM for many years due to its significant natural resource values, including habitat for federally-listed and other special-status species, and connectivity to adjacent public lands.

The property is the only private ownership between CPNM lands owned by BLM and Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), owned by FWS, and thus serves as a crucial link and wildlife movement corridor between currently protected lands within the Carrizo Plain, Cuyama Valley and the southern San Joaquin Valley. The purchase of the property by BLM is critical to ensure the protection of an unbroken habitat corridor for several San Joaquin Valley ecosystem threatened, endangered, and special status species, including San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, California condor, Kern primrose sphinx moth, San Joaquin antelope squirrel, and San Joaquin whipsnake.

The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) (the current property owner) has determined that they must sell the property in the near future based on economic and organizational considerations. TWC recently placed the property on the open market for mitigation or easement sale and is hopeful that BLM can acquire the property using CVPCP, HRP, and other sources of funding. However, if it is sold to a private party, the opportunity for its permanent conservation will be lost or jeopardized.

Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

No Action: Reclamation would not contribute \$874,567 of CVPCP funds and FWS would not contribute \$108,970 of HRP funds to BLM to help purchase the Stubblefield Ranch property. BLM would be required to obtain an additional \$983,537 from other private and public sources besides the approximately \$3,874,463 that BLM needs to obtain from other organizations. If alternative funding cannot be secured, BLM may not be able to acquire the property.

Proposed Action: Reclamation would contribute \$874,567 of CVPCP funds and FWS would contribute \$108,970 of HRP funds to BLM to help purchase the Stubblefield Ranch property. Other organizations would provide approximately \$3,874,463 to BLM to help purchase the property.

Following acquisition by BLM, the property would be incorporated into the CPNM. It would be monitored and managed under the guidelines of the current (2010) or future CPNM Resource Management Plan and other guiding documents prepared by BLM as endangered species habitat with limited opportunities for passive recreation. Any activities with potential to impact Federal or State listed species or protected sensitive habitats would be reviewed as part of the

management plan and permitted as necessary prior to implementation.

Findings

Based on the attached environmental assessment (EA), Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The attached EA describes the existing environmental resources in the Proposed Action area and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on the resources. This EA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR Part 46). Effects on several environmental resources were examined and found to be absent or minor. That analysis is provided in the attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

Following are the reasons why the impacts of the proposed action are not significant:

1. Acquisition of habitat will not change land use.
2. Acquisition will permanently protect 1,615 acres of grassland and alkali scrub habitat for endangered species including San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and other special status species.
3. The proposed action will not affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species.
4. The proposed action has no potential to affect historic properties.
5. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets.
6. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities.
7. The proposed action will not have significant cumulative impacts.
8. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial.

Environmental Assessment

STUBBLEFIELD RANCH ACQUISITION PROJECT



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region

December 2012



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Pacific Southwest Regional Office
Sacramento, California

Mission Statements

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to Indian Tribes and our commitment to island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

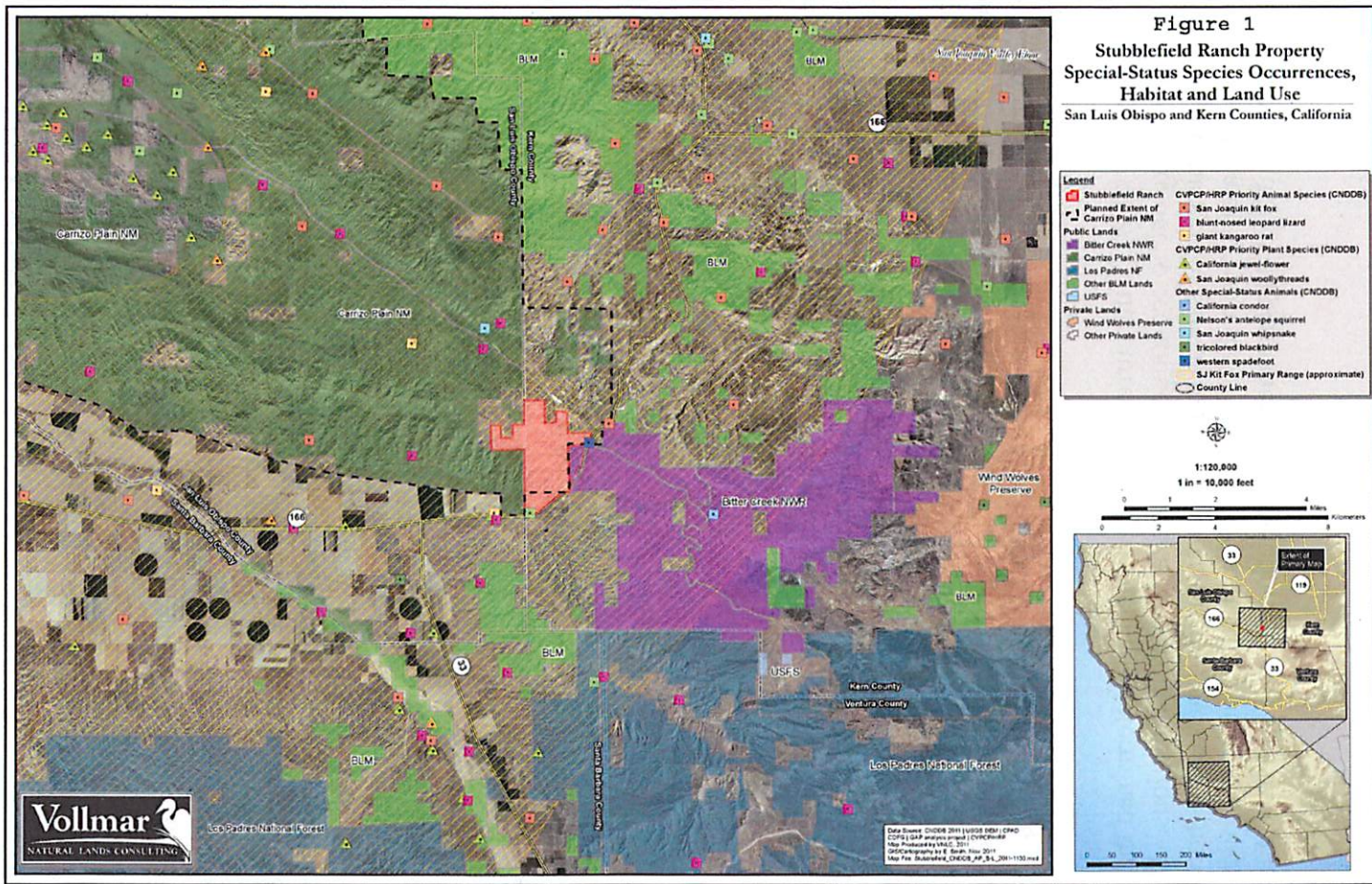


Figure 1. Stubblefield Ranch Property

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and DOI Regulations (43 CFR Part 46), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate and disclose any potential environmental impacts associated with providing \$874,567 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP) and \$108,970 from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program (HRP) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help purchase the 1,615-acre Stubblefield Ranch property. The property is located at the southeastern end of the Carrizo Plain National Monument (CPNM) at the border of San Luis Obispo and Kern Counties (Figure 1). It is located approximately 7 miles southwest of the town of Maricopa (Kern County) and 8.4 miles east of the town of Cuyama (San Luis Obispo County). Acquisition of the property has been a high priority for BLM for many years due to its significant natural resource values, including habitats for federally-listed and other special-status species, and connectivity to adjacent public lands.

1.2 Need for the Proposed Action

The Stubblefield Ranch property is the only private ownership between CPNM lands owned by BLM and Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), owned by FWS, and thus serves as a crucial link and wildlife movement corridor between currently protected lands within the Carrizo Plain, Cuyama Valley and the southern San Joaquin Valley. The purchase of the property by BLM is critical to ensure the protection of an unbroken habitat corridor for several San Joaquin Valley ecosystem threatened, endangered, and special status species, including San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, California condor, Kern primrose sphinx moth, San Joaquin antelope squirrel, and San Joaquin whipsnake.

The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) (the current property owner) has determined that they must sell the property in the near future due to economic and organizational considerations. TWC recently placed the property on the market for sale as mitigation or easement lands and is hopeful that BLM can acquire the property using funding from the CVPCP, HRP, and other sources. However, if it is sold to a private party, the opportunity for its permanent conservation for listed species could be lost or jeopardized.

1.3 Potential Resource Issues

This EA analyzes the affected environment of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative in order to determine the potential impacts and cumulative effects to Biological Resources.

1.4 Resources Not Analyzed in Detail

Effects on several environmental resources were examined and found to be minor. Because of this, the following resources were eliminated from further discussion from this EA: Air Quality; Groundwater; Water Quality; Aesthetic Resources; Geology; Global Climate Change; Soils; Seismicity; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Land Use and Agriculture; Noise; Socioeconomics, Population and Housing; Recreation; Transportation and Circulation; and Utilities and Public Services.

The following resources have minor or no impacts but are being described here due to Department of the Interior and Reclamation concerns:

1.4.1 Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action has no potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to the regulations (36 CFR §800.3(a)(1)) for implementing the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16USC 470). The BLM would own and manage the lands and would have the responsibility to comply with Section 106 of the NHPA for any future undertakings as defined by Section 301 of the NHPA. The awarding of federal funds by Reclamation to BLM for the purpose of acquiring the Stubblefield Ranch is an administrative action without the potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR §800.3(a)(1). (See Appendix A.)

1.4.2 Indian Trust Assets

Indian Trust Assets (ITAs) are legal interests in property or rights held in trust by the United States for Indian Tribes or individual Indians. Indian reservations, Rancherias, and Public Domain Allotments are common ITAs in California. The nearest ITA is Santa Ynez Reservation approximately 43 miles southwest of the project location. The Proposed Action does not have a potential to affect ITAs because the Proposed Action is only an administrative action and because the property and use is not in close proximity to the nearest ITA and any trust responsibilities to the nearest ITA. (See Appendix B.)

1.4.3 Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 requires each Federal agency to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects of its program, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations, including programs involving Native Americans. Acquisition of the Ranch would not affect any existing communities and consequently there would be no adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations.

Section 2 Alternatives Including Proposed Action

2.1 No Action Alternative

Reclamation would not contribute \$974,567 of CVPCP funds and FWS would not contribute \$108,970 of HRP funds to BLM (a total of \$683,537) to help purchase the Stubblefield Ranch property. BLM would be required to obtain an additional \$983,537 from other private and public sources besides the approximately \$3,874,463 that BLM needs to obtain from other sources. If alternative funding cannot be secured, BLM would not acquire the property.

2.2 Proposed Action

Reclamation would contribute \$874,567 of CVPCP funds and FWS would contribute \$108,970 of HRP funds to BLM to help purchase the Stubblefield Ranch property. Other funding sources would provide approximately \$3,874,463 to BLM to purchase the property.

Following acquisition by BLM, the property would be incorporated into the CPNM. It would be monitored and managed under the guidelines of the current (2010) or future CPNM Resource Management Plan and other guiding documents prepared by BLM as endangered species habitat with limited opportunities for passive recreation. Any activities with potential to impact federal or state listed species or protected sensitive habitats would be reviewed as part of the management plan and permitted as necessary prior to implementation.

Section 3 Affected Environment & Environmental Consequences

This section identifies the potentially affected environmental resources and the environmental consequences that could result from the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

3.1 Biological Resources

3.1.1 Affected Environment

Habitats found at Stubblefield Ranch include approximately 1,076 acres of grasslands, 502 acres of scrub/shrub (mixed saltbush scrub and Sonoran subshrub scrub), and 37 acres of 'bare ground' (mostly alkali sink habitat). The southern portion of the property is within a low gradient valley and there are areas in the central northern portion of the site with evident alkaline basins. These areas are likely hotspots for giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard and Nelson's antelope squirrel which thrive in more barren areas (Figure 2).

No focused surveys for special-status species have been conducted on the property. However, there are several documented occurrences located on, or in the immediate vicinity of, the property. In addition to species occurrences documented in the California Department of Fish and Game's California Natural Diversity Data Base, BLM records for the property include an active San Joaquin kit fox den observation by BLM CPNM biologist Kathy Sharum, and sightings of western burrowing owls. Ms. Sharum has also observed giant kangaroo rats and blunt-nosed leopard lizards within a mile of the property. Based on these documented occurrences and the location and size of habitat characteristics of the property, the following special-status species are known or likely to occur on the site: San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, Nelson's antelope squirrel, San Joaquin whipsnake, western spadefoot, and western burrowing owl. There is potential for California jewelflower to occur on the property given its documented occurrence just west of the southern end of the property. There is also potential for the Kern primrose sphinx moth on the property. Surveys for these species will be conducted as needed to substantiate on-site occurrences. A juvenile male California condor was seen by TWC personnel on the ground at the property in October 2011.

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

No Action

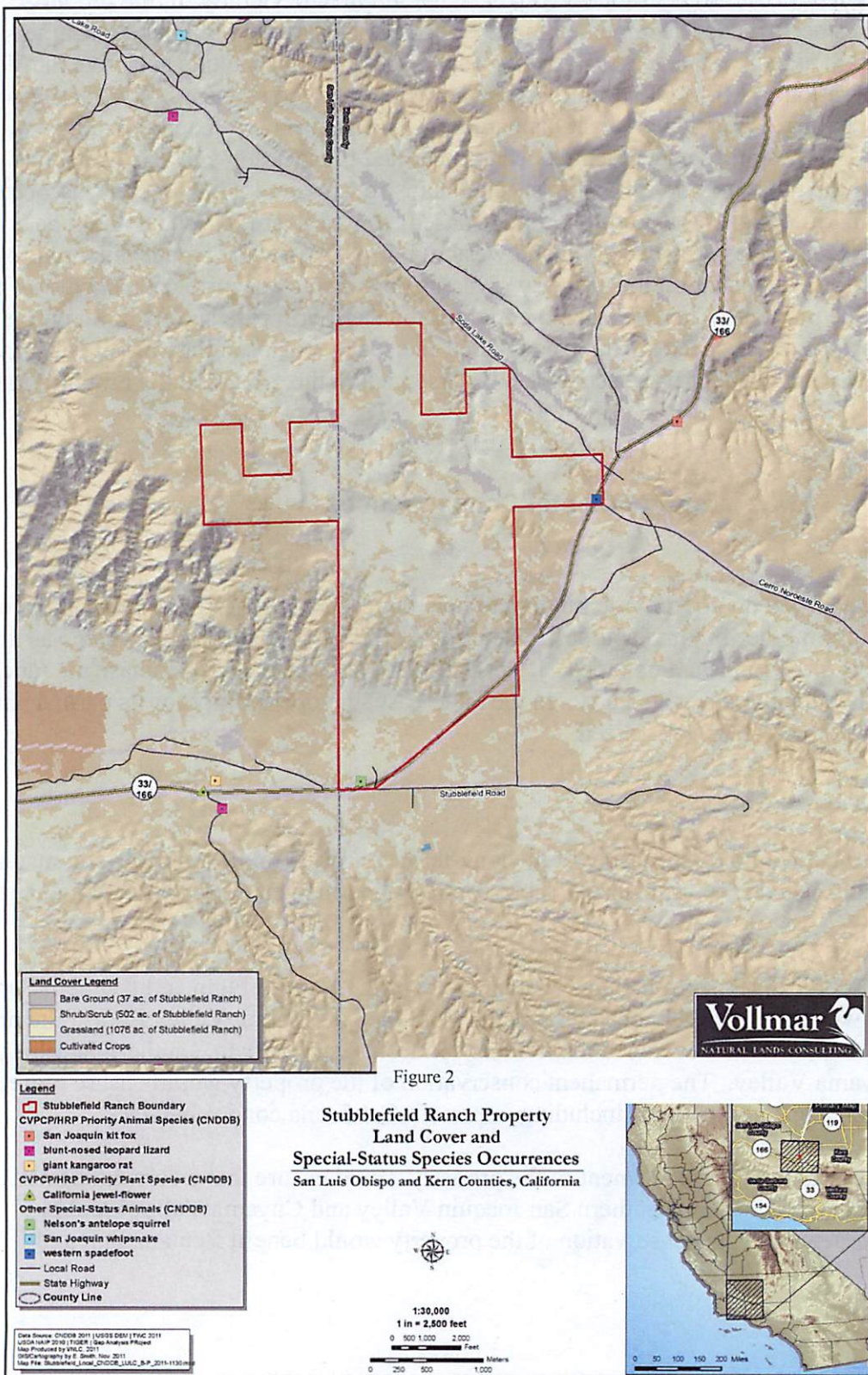
If Reclamation and FWS do not provide funding to help purchase the ranch, BLM would have to find additional funds from other funding sources. The effects of no action would be the same as the proposed action if these funds are obtained. If not, BLM may not be able to purchase the ranch and TWC may sell the ranch to a private party. In the latter case, the opportunity for its permanent conservation would be lost or jeopardized.

Proposed Action

The proposed project would directly benefit the long-term conservation, restoration, and management of several federally-listed species, listed in Table 1, through permanent protection and management of their habitats.

The property supports a mosaic of habitats characteristic of the Carrizo Plain and southern San Joaquin Valley, habitats which have largely been eliminated from the San Joaquin Valley floor. The property is located along a corridor of undeveloped habitat that connects Carrizo Plain, southern San Joaquin Valley, and Cuyama Valley. The permanent conservation of the property would ensure protection of rare and endangered species habitats, including important California condor habitat.

Permanent conservation and management of the property would ensure that a corridor of natural habitat linking the Carrizo Plain, southern San Joaquin Valley and Cuyama Valley would be maintained in perpetuity. The conservation of the property would benefit Reclamation and FWS by



linking recovery areas along the western fringe of the San Joaquin Valley, and adding preserved habitats contiguous with hundreds of thousands of acres of Federal public lands, thus meeting the goals of the CVPCP and HRP.

By conserving the property, all of its habitats, listed species, and other resources would be protected in perpetuity thereby assuring that public resources held in trust by the Federal Government are protected. The public would also benefit from the open space and natural environment of the property, including the expansive views of the area from Highway 166.

The property is the third largest private inholding within the CPNM and it provides critical connectivity between the CPNM and the Bitter Creek NWR. Bitter Creek NWR connects to the Los Padres National Forest, as well as the Wind Wolves Preserve (proposed conservation easement on 95,000 acres) and Tejon Ranch (62,000 acres under conservation easement). The Stubblefield Ranch is located at a “pinch point” of private lands within a landscape of Federal and conserved lands that link the coast range to the San Joaquin Valley, across the San Emigdio Mountain foothills, to habitats in the Tejon Ranch, Sierra Nevada, and Mojave Desert.

Table 1. Federal and state listed and other special-status species that may benefit from the proposed BLM acquisition of the Stubblefield Ranch property.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status ^a	State Status ^b	Other Status ^c	Species Verified Presence (Y/N) ^d
Plants					
California jewelflower	<i>Caulanthus californicus</i>	E	E	CNPS 1B	N
Invertebrates					
Kern primrose sphinx moth	<i>Euproserpinus euterpe</i>	T	-	-	N
Amphibians					
Western spadefoot	<i>Spea hammondi</i>	-	-	FSC/CSC	Y
Reptiles					
Blunt-nosed leopard lizard	<i>Gambelia sila</i>	E	E	FP	N
San Joaquin whipsnake	<i>Masticophis flagellum ruddocki</i>			FSC/CSC	N
Mammals					
San Joaquin kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>	E	T	-	Y
Giant kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys ingens</i>	E	E	-	N
Nelson's antelope squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus nelsoni</i>	-	T	FSC	Y
Birds					
California condor	<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>	E	E	FP	N
Western burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	-	-	CSC	Y
Tricolored blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	-	-	CSC	N

^aE = federally listed as endangered, T= federally listed as threatened, P=federally proposed for listing

^bE = state listed as endangered, R = state listed as rare, T = state listed as threatened, C = state listed as candidate

^cC=federally listed as candidate, FSC = federal species of concern, CSC = California species of special concern, FP = California fully protected species

^dThis list should be on the *actual property/parcel* that is being proposed for protection and/or restoration, not just the general geographic area.

3.2 Cumulative Effects

According to CEQ regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA, a cumulative impact is defined as *the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions*. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

There are no adverse impacts associated with implementing the Proposed Action, and therefore there are no cumulative effects to consider.

Section 4 Consultation and Coordination

On February 7, 2012, CVPCP and HRP Managers met with BLM staff and representatives of TWC at the site of the proposed action. During the meeting the parties discussed the potential benefits and impacts of the proposed action on CVPCP/HRP priority habitats and species, and how BLM would manage the property to protect priority habitats and species while fulfilling their mandate to provide certain public uses of the property should the proposed action take place. Discussions centered on how negative impacts could be avoided and benefits enhanced when managing the property for each of those purposes.

Appendix A

Cultural Resources Compliance

From: Barnes, Amy J
Sent: Monday, August 06, 2012 9:01 AM
To: Strait, Daniel H; Stefani, Rosemary A; Kleinsmith, Douglas H
Cc: BOR MPR Cultural Resources Section
Subject: Stubblefield Ranch Acquisition Project (12-SCAO-181)

Tracking #12-SCAO-181

Project: Stubblefield Ranch Acquisition Project

Location: Kern and San Luis Obispo Counties

The proposed undertaking to provide funds to the BLM for the purpose of acquiring 1,615 acre ranch has no potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to the 36 CFR §800.3(a)(1). The proposed action involves Reclamation providing Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) funds to BLM to acquire the Stubblefield Ranch. The BLM will own and manage the lands and will have the responsibility to comply with Section 106 regarding any future undertakings as defined by Section 301(7) of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470). The use of federal appropriations by Reclamation to be used by BLM to acquire the Stubblefield Ranch that will be incorporated into the Carrizo Plain National Monument is an administrative action.

This email memo is intended to convey the conclusion of the Section 106 process for this undertaking. Please retain a copy of this memo with the project administrative record.

Amy J. Barnes, Archaeologist M.A.
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Mid-Pacific Region, MP-153
2800 Cottage Way
Sacramento, CA 95825
916-978-5047
abarnes@usbr.gov

Appendix B

Indian Trust Assets Compliance

From: Rivera, Patricia L
Sent: Monday, December 03, 2012 3:21 PM
To: Kleinsmith, Douglas H
Subject: RE: Resubmitting Stubblefield Ranch Acquisition ITA request

Doug,

I reviewed the proposed action where Reclamation would provide \$874,567 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help purchase the 1,615-acre Stubblefield Ranch property. The property is the only private ownership between CPNM lands owned by BLM and Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), owned U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), and thus serves as a crucial link and wildlife movement corridor between currently protected lands within the Carrizo Plain, Cuyama Valley and the southern San Joaquin Valley. The purchase of the property by BLM is critical to ensure the protection of an unbroken habitat corridor for several San Joaquin Valley ecosystem threatened and endangered species, including San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, California condor, Kern primrose sphinx moth, San Joaquin antelope squirrel, and San Joaquin whipsnake.

The proposed action does not have a potential to affect Indian Trust Assets. The nearest ITA is Santa Ynez Reservation approximately 43 miles SW of the project location.

This action is administrative, e.g., money provided to another agency for the purchase of property to be used as habitat corridor for ecosystem threatened and endangered species. Further the property and use is not in close proximity to the nearest ITA and any trust responsibilities to the nearest ITA.

Patricia Rivera
Native American Affairs Program Manager
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RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West